

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER 1999

ONE DOLLAR





## Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

In this column during the past several months, we've given you a fairly extensive look into that part of our mission statement that talks about providing opportunities for everyone to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation. We're always pleased when our constituents are able to participate in a hunting, fishing, boating or wildlife-watching opportunity, and we're tremendously delighted when that participation is done safely. So, for this month I would like to call your attention to the part of our mission statement that talks about promoting safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

While the upcoming holiday weekend for Labor Day somewhat unofficially marks the end of our summer, it is also a very busy time on our waterways for recreational boating. We're fast approaching having nearly 240,000 recreational boats registered here in the Commonwealth, with personal watercraft accounting for over 20,000 of those boats. With more boats out on the water, we're always reminding boaters that a little extra care and caution is needed when maneuvering Virginia's rivers and lakes. Last year, 20 people

lost their lives in boating accidents. As this issue goes for printing, we've had 18 boating accident fatalities. And please note that one of the most consistent statistics that we have in recreational boating is that about 80 percent of boat accident fatalities likely could have been avoided if the individual had been wearing a life jacket.

Holiday weekends always draw boaters to the water, and just like the July 4th weekend, we expect the Labor Day weekend to be busy. We're very pleased to report that no fatalities occurred during the 4th, and we want you to help us keep that trend going over Labor Day. Following a couple of basic rules will certainly go a long ways in that regard. First, boating and alcohol do not mix—boating without alcohol just makes sense. Second, all boaters should wear their personal flotation devices. It's not enough to have them on board, since accidents can happen too fast for occupants in the boat to locate and put on their life jacket. Following these two basic rules will help to ensure a safe and fun day on the water.

We truly do hope that all of our readers have had many safe opportunities this summer to spend time in the outdoors enjoying the "lazy, hazy days of the season." Along with our bounty of wildlife resources, one of the



Lee Walker

most enjoyable aspects of our wonderful Commonwealth is its changing seasons. At this time each year, we often take a nostalgic look back at how we spent our summer. But then we're reminded that fall is just right around the corner, and we look ahead to what that season can provide us. In an upcoming column, we look forward to sharing with you a few more comments on safety, as you prepare to go in the fields, forests and wetlands during our hunting seasons. Hope your summer was great and that you will have a safe and enjoyable Labor Day.

### Mission Statement

*To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.*

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James S. Gilmore III, Governor

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If you think you have what it takes to be a  
duck hunter then you might want to read  
"The Afflicted" on page 9.

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: Bobwhite quail, ©Lloyd Hill

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*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*

# Sweet Springs & Beaver

*Can you put  
a price on  
paradise?  
Well, that's just  
what one  
Alleghany  
County couple  
has done and  
it's attracting  
anglers from  
around the  
country.*

written & photographed  
by King Montgomery



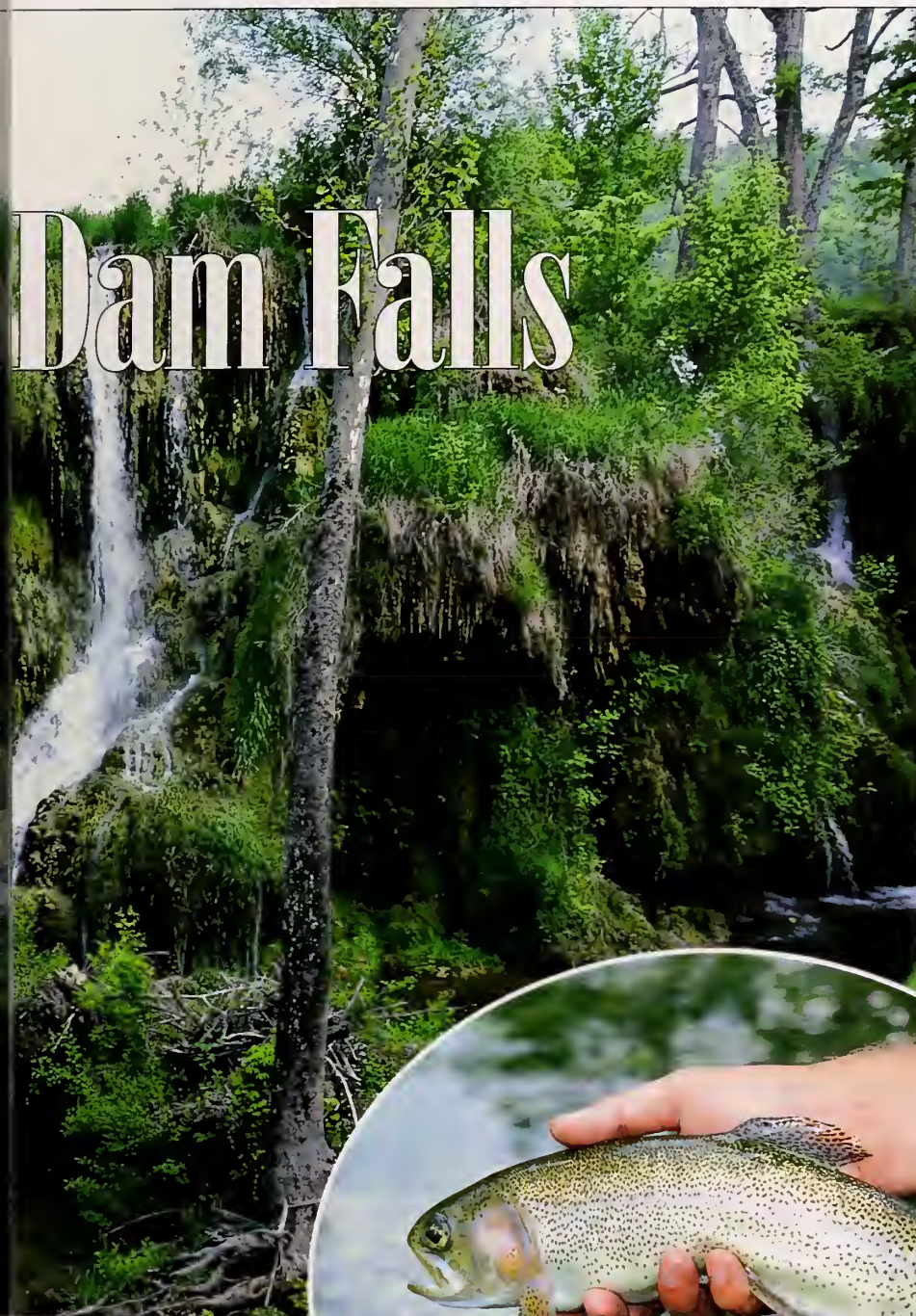
**T**his rabbit-strip Zonker is one of the best flies to use here on Sweet Springs Creek," said angling guide Demian Wiles. "Watch how it looks in the water," and he flipped the ungainly looking fly at the end of the leader into the water, and moved the rod tip to impart action. "See how the rabbit fur undulates, moves like a min-

now, and..." His tutorial was rudely interrupted by a 12-inch wild rainbow trout that darted from under a dark rock ledge in the crystal-clear water, grabbed the fly, and headed toward nearby West Virginia.

Startled, Demian quickly recovered and deftly played the fish until he reached down and slipped the barbless hook from the trout's mouth. It hovered at Demian's feet



# Dam Falls



*Beaver Dam Falls Farm is a 250-acre working farm in Alleghany County that is home to almost two miles of blue ribbon trout stream. Rainbow trout in Sweet Springs Creek, which flows through the farm, range in size from fingerlings to over 25 inches.*



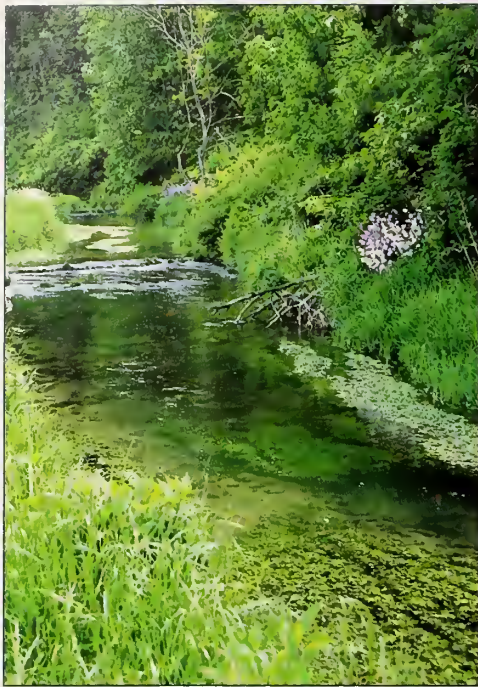
for awhile, as if to show off its iridescent beauty. Then it slowly swam away and returned to its rocky den. "I believe I'll tie one of those on, Demian," I said with a grin. Several more rainbows, including the largest one in all of Sweet Springs Creek, would take the Zonker.

The nearly two miles of Sweet Springs Creek, that flows through Barry and Kathleen Goodwin's Beaver Dam Falls Farm in Alleghany County, is managed as a first-rate fly fishing only, catch-and-release rainbow trout fishery. Demian Wiles is the head guide and runs the small Orvis-endorsed fly shop in the old wooden mill that sits astride the middle section of the stream. The spring creek flows out of Monroe County, West Virginia and, fed by springs and runoff along the way, enters Dunlap Creek, which in turn flows into the Jackson River at Covington.

The Goodwin's stretch of Sweet Springs is accented by three scenic waterfalls, beautiful in their own right, that break up the stream into three distinct parts: the meadow stretch below the upper falls; the heavily vegetated meadow below the middle falls at the old mill; and finally, the majestic Beaver Dam Falls and the wooded free-stone stretch of water that reaches to the lower property line.

## Nature of a Spring Creek

Spring creeks owe their source and their name to clear, cold springs that bubble up from limestone formations deep within the ground and flow downhill, sometimes fed by more springs along the way. Extremely fertile, spring creeks abound with plant and animal life. Aquatic vegetation provides shelter and oxygen to the system, and fish use it for cover and as a place for finding food. In a spring creek, food



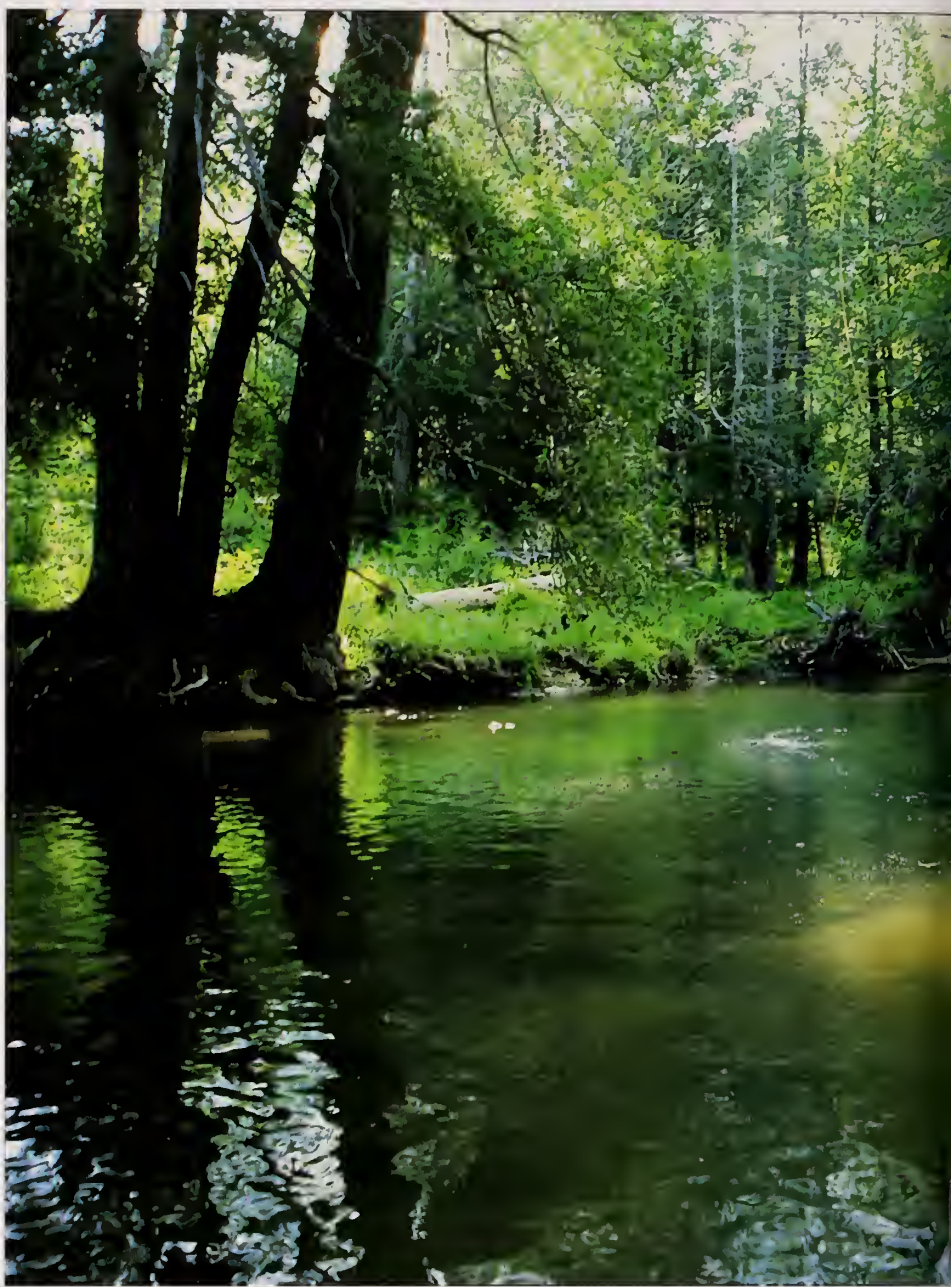
*The upper part of Sweet Springs Creek is a meadow stream. Watercress abounds in the creek while wildflowers grace the bank.*

is so abundant that a fly has to be the right one, and presented at just the right time in a flawless manner. In short, spring creeks can be tough to fish.

I recommend you use a fishing guide the first time you fish any body of water, particularly spring creeks. Learn from the mistakes of others so you don't have to learn from your own. If you plan to fish Sweet Springs Creek for two days, I suggest you hire a guide for the first full or half-day. You will learn more from a good guide in half a day than you can learn by yourself in half a month or longer.

### **The Upper Stretch**

The Goodwin's property line lies just below the first falls where the water enters their land flowing swiftly, richly oxygenated. While there are some trees along the way, this part of the creek courses a meadow that is sometimes planted with crops. The banks are relatively clear of fly-catching vegetation, but grasses and wildflowers form a riparian



buffer that filters impurities before they reach the water and provides some cover for the surreptitious angler. Stealth and a long leader are usually needed when fishing a spring creek; with water so clear, the fish will usually see you before you see them. Wear earth-tone colors or light blue to blend against the sky or into the background. This part of the creek is excellent dry fly water from spring through the fall. Demian and I used a tandem fly rig for several of

our fish: a dry fly on top as an attracter and strike indicator with a nymph tied on a 12 to 18 inch leader attached to the dry fly hook bend.

### **The Middle Section**

The middle falls cascade into the part of the stream that used to drive the wheel on the old grist mill. We moved to the first pool below the falls and studied the water always a good idea on a spring creek. We also



watched the ground spotting grasshoppers, ants, and beetles, and noted airborne activity from dragonflies and damselflies. We knew that terrestrial fly patterns work well on spring creeks, but for now Demian had something else in mind. He left me in a sitting position in the high grass along the bank and crept forward on hands and knees to the head of the pool. A rapid shoot of water descended along a slough that plunged into the head of the pool.

*Demain Wiles, (above) strikes a rainbow that took a nymph on the lower stretch of Sweet Springs Creek. He advises that "you should study the water a lot on a spring creek." Michael, the Goodwin's Pomeranian, (right) often shadows visitors to the farm, barking his approval at each successful catch.*

"A huge trout, one of the largest in the creek," he whispered "It's holding just below where that gush of water enters the pool. Your cast will have to be perfect." Perfect, however, was not good enough. Demian watched from his crouch as the fly hit the target, but was swept away from the trout by the velocity of the water. After consultation, I crawled to a spot above the rainbow and, with Demian watching the fish, I dropped the rabbit-strip Zonker into the slough, fed out some line, and let it sweep toward the trout's lie. On the fourth drift, the current and the fish gods were right and the magnificent rainbow took the fly!

No more need for stealth, Demian laughed, whooped, and hollered while the fish made one of its several long, powerful runs toward trouble: rocks on one side, thick watercress on the others. I had to put enough pressure on the fish to keep it in the deep pool.

Tiring, the fish swam closer to the surface. Even allowing for angling measurement exuberance, this monster was at least 25 inches long. Then the trout did something more suited to catfish behavior: it rolled up on the line. Tired but not whipped, the fish's gyrations levered the barbless



hook from the corner of its mouth. The line went slack, and so did Demian's jaw. I looked at him, and stared at where the fish had been. "Oh, well. I got the best part, a great fight, out of it," I said thanking Demian for his skillful guiding, and trying not to think of the missed photo opportunity.

Farther downstream we could see trout lying along the bottom, just above the watercress. The dark vermiculation on their backs provides camouflage from overhead observation; you usually see them only when they moved. Here then was one of the many spring creek dilemmas: if you cast upstream your line could spook the fish; and if you cast downstream on a slack line, they might see you as they always face upstream.

Demian opted for the latter presentation and he floated a dry fly to a wild rainbow who obliged my camera by taking the offering and jumping after the hook was set. Michael, the Goodwin's affable Pomeranian, who inconspicuously had shadowed us most of the day, barked his approval.

## The Lower Creek

Just below the run where Demian caught the wild rainbow, the creek gathers momentum before cascading over the Beaver Dam Falls, the largest and most spectacular of the Sweet Springs' falls. Below the falls, the creek changes personality once again. A feeder stream brings runoff to mix with the spring-fed waters, and the stream loses its pure spring creek characteristics. The geology moves downward from plateau to rocky canyon.

The creek flows over rocks and ledges; it is now more a freestone stream and trees line the banks to catch your backcast. The water is no

longer as clear, or as cold, and the bright green watercress is gone. But the trout are still there, and will take a well-presented fly; either a dry when bugs are hatching or weighted nymphs and streamers when they are not.

All three parts of the Sweet Springs Creek are full of rainbow trout, some stocked, some hold-



*Sweet Springs Creek offers anglers a wide variety of trout fishing waters, so it's recommended that you bring a good selection of flies. Old Earlehurst Inn (above) caters to anglers who visit Sweet Springs Creek*

overs, and some wild ones born in the stream. But despite stocking, fishing here is not "like shooting fish in a barrel." Spring creeks do not give up their fish easily, regardless of how the fish got there. Still there are plenty here to rise to a fly, and your chances of catching quality rainbow trout here are very good. And it's a beautiful place to be.

Reservations are needed to fish since the Goodwins only allow six rods per day. Call them at (540) 559-2622 or e-mail: [bgoodwin@cfw.com](mailto:bgoodwin@cfw.com). In season, turkey and deer hunting are also offered at Beaver Dam Falls Farm.

## Old Earlehurst

When fishing or hunting Sweet Springs Creek, stay at the Old Earlehurst bed-and-breakfast located a half mile from Beaver Dam Falls Farm. The inn is made from old logs from five different homes built originally in the 18th and 19th centuries. Completed in 1997, the inn has five spacious bedrooms with private baths, a first floor reception-dining area, an upstairs sitting room, and two porches. Two fireplaces add to the atmosphere of this charming place.

Innkeepers Jerry and Rose Humphreys cater to fly anglers who come to fish the fabled Sweet Springs Creek and the new Escatawba Farms fee fishing operation on nearby Dunlap Creek.

For reservations or information, call (540) 559-3071 or -4030. Visit their Web site at [www.webfeatinc.com/oldearlehurst/](http://www.webfeatinc.com/oldearlehurst/).

*King Montgomery is a senior field editor for Virginia Outdoor Weekly and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Editor for Fly Fish America magazine. A freelance writer from Annandale, King is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.*



**THE  
AFFLICTED**

# There are hunters and then there are **DUCK HUNTERS**

by David Brewster  
illustrations by Emily Pels

**M**an admires his fellow man in a variety of ways. The ancient Greeks wrote volumes about this subject. The Greeks divided love, admiration, and respect into the four categories of Eros, Filial, Storge, and Agape. In a thumbnail these categories are sexual, family, idealistic, and spiritual in nature. After an exhaustive review, however, the writer could not find a single reference to admiration for duck hunters.

Not one.

I am a Southern male, and the Greeks lived in southern Europe. If I admire duck hunters, why didn't the Greeks? Could the omission be a significant oversight on their part? How can one not admire men who rise well before dawn and pray on bended knee for the worst weather of the year. Freezing rain or snow, winds at 20 plus knots, and arctic temperatures bring joy to a duck hunter, his dog, and no one else. Most of us who enjoy this sport are barely tolerated by spouses. Friends smile and note that duck hunters are not capable of playing with all 52 cards.

Being considered odd makes most duck hunters feel lonely. So finding a fellow human who shares the dementia that afflicts them is truly a happy moment. There are

years ago. I was working part-time nights at a large civic arena in Norfolk, Virginia. The event, on the evening I describe, was that theatrical form

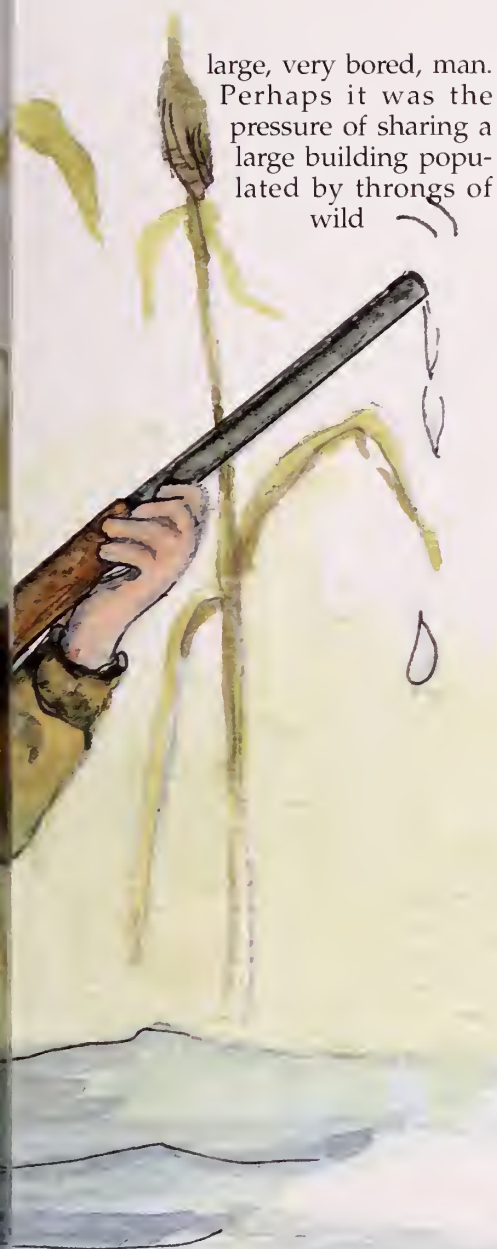


two forms of human encounter that most men never forget. Meeting a woman and falling in love is memorable. Almost equally significant for me is meeting a fellow duck hunter. There is an almost palpable sense of relief when I confess my weakness for waterfowl and my fellow discussant lowers his defense and confesses he, too, is afflicted.

I had one such encounter about 11

of sport known as professional "wrestling." Because this sport has very loyal fans and a high level of volatility we staffed heavily for those events. That night by sheer luck, while hiding backstage, I met Lee Woitshek.

I had no reason to suspect this would be a significant meeting. He was much younger than I and my first impression was this is a very



large, very bored, man. Perhaps it was the pressure of sharing a large building populated by throngs of wild

place on the Northern Neck near Saluda." I was thunderstruck he was a duck hunter. He needed no references, no letters of introduction, he was one of us.

Like a blushing debutante, I stammered, "Yeesss!, I'd love to go."

It took three trips before I could fully gauge my newly found friend. We made arrangements for the first hunt. Lee said "I'll meet you in the city garage at 4:00 a.m and I only wait five minutes." I got up at 3:30 a.m. with time to spare (just a ten minute drive). I hit the garage door opener and as I backed out I felt the unmistakable bump of a flat tire. I changed the tire and went to afterburners driving to the agreed meeting place. Only five minutes late, I was sure he would be there, but I found an empty garage.

I spent the day fretting, and that evening when I called I said "I know you won't believe it but I had a flat tire." In my mind's eye I could see him mouthing "Yeah...Sure you did!!" After a lengthy apology on my part he invited me again for the following morning.

I know that most readers will not believe it when I tell them the next morning at the exact same time I had another flat tire. While readers may be gullible enough to believe this story I knew no self respecting duck hunter would. Rather than change the tire I drove the car to a nearby service station. I had paid extra for my alloy rims, which are as hard as butter on a hot day. As I inflated the tire I noticed several bends that would require me to buy another \$200 rim, but at least I would be there on time.

He gave me that "Yeah...sure..." look when I told him that I'd had another flat. Later during our 75 minute drive he explained we would be wading in knee deep marsh water to get to a spot where he had seen some woodies. As I donned my hip boots I failed to no-

tice he was wearing waders. The night was that pitch black found only in the country far from cities. Lacking a flashlight and being a trusting fool, I followed my new friend into the swamp and in no time I was in water over my waist. For those who do not understand the subtle distinction between my hip boots and Lee's waders, let me say simply that my boots were full of water, very cold water. Early season in Virginia is the first part of October, but the water seemed much colder, verging on frosty. This would be the first of three bouts with hypothermia that I would experience following my new duck hunting buddy.

Those of you that are old hands will understand this next part. The woodies never flew, but my new friend was a determined fellow and he was willing to wait them out. While I did hint that my toes were a trifle damp, I knew that if I tried to quit I would be labeled a whiner who used phony excuses for being late. I had to stand and shiver or lose the new friend. Over the years I have been more than compensated for shivering through that morning, but on this particular morning there was to be no further benefit in being Lee Woitshek's friend. When we arrived back at the garage where I had left my car I noticed that the tire was again flat. I was almost relieved. Now, he would know that I had not made up the story. As he slowed down I turned to say something funny and suddenly there was this intense shoving sensation in the small of my back. Awkwardly, I fell from his truck through a suddenly open door. I regained my feet just in time to hear him mutter "See ya later" as he turned the corner on two wheels exiting the garage. Wet, cold, and alone, I changed my tire.

It was on hunt number three that I met the real Lee Woitshek, or "Whitey" as his friends call him. The following week we tried the same

*Freezing rain, snow, high winds and arctic temperatures create those special moments in the heart of a duck hunter.*

wrestling fans that caused me to quickly admit I was a duck hunter. Lee, however, was more cautious than I and hid his trump cards. Toward the end of the evening I encountered him again and he said almost casually, "You know early season starts next week and I know this

place at the same time. Whitey explained that this was indeed an unusual honeyhole and when the woodies flew it would be fast and furious and all over in eight minutes. Whitey was carrying an Ithaca 10 gauge autoloader. It was modern enough that we didn't have to hunt for flint stone to shoot it, but at the same time old enough to have value as an antique.

We were standing in knee deep water. I was wearing some newly acquired waders, dawn was just breaking, and Whitey whispered "Any second now!" For the first and only time in his life he was prophetic. I felt like a sailor in the U.S. Navy off Okinawa during the closing days of WW II. Woodies came from every direction. I was reloading and firing and Whitey was fiddling with his gun. I was reloading and firing and Whitey was cussing at his gun. As I was reloading the third time I looked over at Whitey just as he was releasing the spring that put pressure on the bolt of his shotgun. I heard the sound of metal giving and saw springs and parts flying in all directions. Whitey had problems, but unlike my flat tires, the problems belonged to him. I was too busy trying to connect with the woodies to appreciate the sight of Whitey blindly trying to feel for his gun parts in the cold swampy water.

Veteran duck hunters now realize that this is a story I have told at Whitey's expense for years. Whitey now even claims that my ejected shells were bouncing off his bald head as he tried vainly to find the critical missing parts. When I stopped laughing some years later, I realized I had found a true, if somewhat unlucky friend.

Non-veteran duck hunters will never understand those who are passionate about this sport and we, the afflicted, will continue to appreciate their tolerance.

---

*David Brewster has a Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky and is descended from a long line of waterfowlers.*



A close-up profile of a Canada goose's head and neck, facing right. The goose has a black head and neck with a prominent white cheek patch. The background is a solid, muted green. The title "Summer Geese" is overlaid in white serif font.

# Summer Geese

by David Hart



©David Hart

*Who says a goose hunt has to be a toe-numbing experience? Virginia waterfowl hunters can experience some fantastic action when iced tea takes the place of hot coffee.*

**R**emember the good old days of goose hunting? Back when migratory Canada goose numbers were at all-time highs and the Eastern Shore drew deep-pocketed hunters from all over the world? Goose hunting hasn't been the same since the population nose-dived and wildlife managers shut down the season on migratory birds.



*You don't have to be world class champion caller (above) to bring in a flock of resident geese in September. Just mimic the sounds that they make and don't call too much.*

But if I didn't know better, I'd say the heyday of goose hunting is right now. In some regions, Canada goose numbers are at record highs, bag limits are liberal and seasons are rel-

atively long. Best of all, you don't have to empty your bank account to get in on a good goose shoot.

Thanks to an ever-increasing population of resident Canada geese, Virginia hunters have some of the best waterfowl hunting opportunities they've had in decades. Ironically, some die-hard waterfowlers who yearn for those "good ol' days" can't bring themselves to participate in the September season. "Too hot," they say.

Yes, it is warm in September, but the geese don't care. They fly in the coolest part of the morning and pitch into a decoy spread like a flock of migrant geese fresh in from the north. Geese are geese, whether they were born and raised right here in Virginia or somewhere on the chilly tundra of Canada.

According to Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' waterfowl biologist Gary Costanzo, Virginia's resident goose population is somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 birds. Many of those geese spend their entire lives in suburban parks and other areas off-limits to hunting, but the vast majority of the state's stay-here geese live in rural regions. These resident Canada's have become a major headache for farmers. That translates to more hunting opportunities.

The September goose season is slowly earning respect from hardcore hunters who anticipate the return of a lengthy migratory goose season. The popularity of the early season is increasing, and the number of birds killed by hunters is also on the rise. That's exactly what wildlife managers hoped for.

"The population is still increasing in some areas, particularly in areas that aren't open to hunting," said Costanzo, "but where hunting is allowed, the population is starting to stabilize." So how do you cash in on this great hunting opportunity?

First, you have to find the geese and get permission to hunt. While some farmers protect their deer and quail populations for friends and family, they often open their gates to

## Guns and Loads

Generally, larger shot sizes work best for Canada geese. Most hunters use BB's, BBB's or T's, but nothing smaller than #2's. Modified or even improved cylinder chokes are recommended by steel shot manufacturers. Ten-gauge shotguns pack a little more punch and a few more pellets than 12's, but either will work just fine. Just limit your shots and remember to lead the birds. Geese may appear to fly slow, but they can actually cover some distance in no time.



©David Hart

anyone willing to put a dent in the local goose population. A flock of geese can decimate a winter wheat field in a matter of days and they have been blamed for infecting farm ponds.

Spend some time driving the

back roads and looking for flocks of geese around ponds and in pastures, then start knocking on doors. There's a good chance you'll get a few "no's," but then you might hit a goose hunting gold mine.

This time of year, the best place to hunt geese is along the edge of a farm pond in the middle of a large pasture. Geese use these little watering holes as sort of a home base, returning to them from a night or morning of feeding. Just make sure the birds are using the pond before you hunt it. Fresh droppings, feathers and tracks in the mud all indicate the birds are using the pond.

Simply set out a few decoys, throw together a makeshift blind, or hide in some nearby brush and wait for the birds to filter back to the pond. Sometimes, the geese show up on cue, dropping into the decoys in small bunches; other mornings they don't show up at all. Typically, though, September geese tend to fly early in the morning and later in the afternoon. In the heat of the mid-

day, they don't move much at all. In fact, the ac-

tion usually slows to a crawl by 9 a.m., as geese settle into their mid-day routines.

If you haven't seen any birds by 9 a.m., you stand a good chance of going home empty-handed. Get to your hunting area early and get set up before the start of legal shooting time. You'll probably see a short window of opportunity when all the birds seem to take to the

air at once. When it's over, it's usually over for the rest of the morning.

Another option is to hunt Virginia's larger rivers by setting out a spread of decoys around mid-river boulders. In the heat of the summer, geese will spend the bulk of their day loafing on or around water. Hunters who are there to intercept them as they come back from a night of feeding will likely get some good shooting.

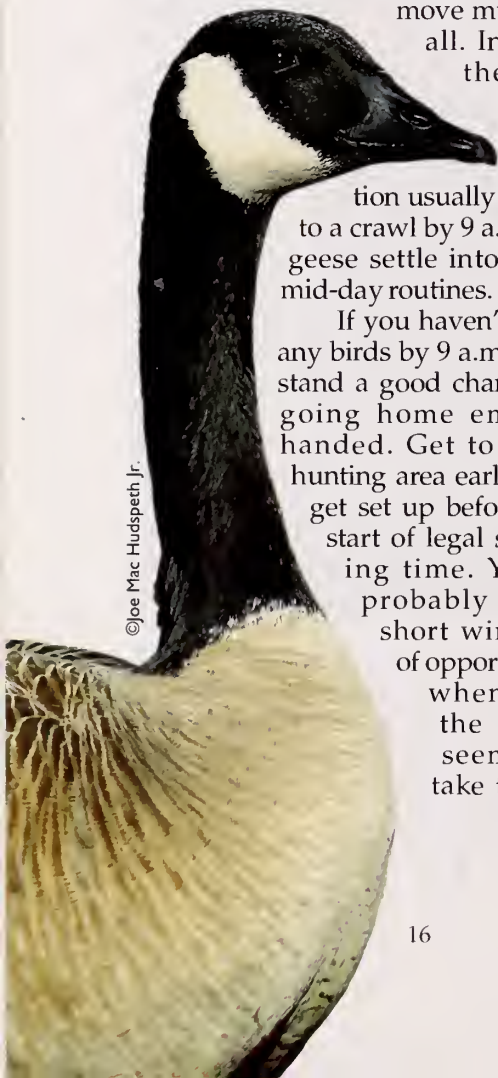
Large decoy spreads, up to three or four dozen, will pull birds better than small spreads, but don't think a half-dozen fake geese won't do the trick. Sometimes, a few decoys are all it takes to lure a flock of geese within range.

"There are times when the local birds are actually harder to kill than the migrants," said Costanzo, an avid waterfowl hunter. "The resident geese know which areas are safe and which areas aren't. They also have their minds made up on where they want to go every day."

In other words, if the geese are going from their daily feeding area to their usual roost pond, you have little chance of drawing them to your decoy spread, no matter how many decoys you have. You have to set up in areas they are using on a regular basis. Resident geese will change their flight, feeding, and roost patterns only when the weather, food sources or human interference alters their normal routines.

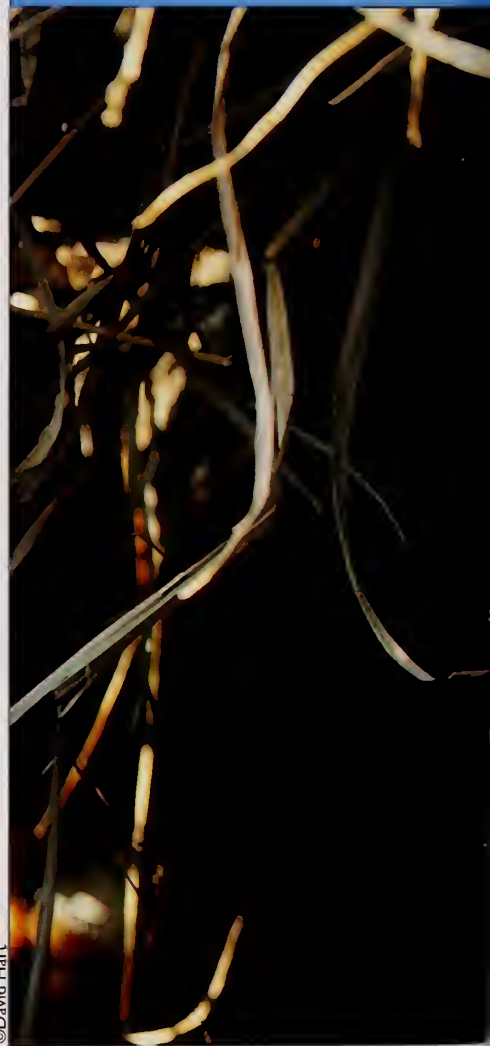
If you happen to be in the spot the geese are using on a regular basis, a five-bird limit might come quick, even with only three or four decoys. In fact, some hunters don't even bother with decoys at all. They find a "hot" pond, hunker down in the bushes and wait for the geese to come back for their mid-morning drink. If the birds want to use that area, they will come in, decoys or no decoys. It boils down to being in the right place at the right time.

That's where scouting can give you the upper hand. Follow the birds, figure out where they are



©Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr.

©David Hart



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going and try to get permission on the ponds and fields the geese are using.

Steve Wharton, a real estate agent and dedicated goose hunter from Alexandria, suggested a few basic rules for calling resident geese.

"Most of the time, I just try to imitate the geese that I'm trying to call in," he said. "If the birds are calling a lot, then I'm going to do the same. If they are pretty quiet, then I'm going to keep my calling to a minimum. I think it's just as important to break up your calling and use a variety of different sounds."

When the resident season first opened up back in 1992, Wharton, along with others who hunted these geese, found that the birds decoyed pretty easily. Limits came quick for those who were in the right place at the right time, but things have changed.

"They've gotten a lot smarter over the past couple of years and have become quite a challenge," he noted.

With so many birds and such a long season, however, a hunter who spends enough time watching over a spread of decoys should get plenty of action. □

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*David Hart is an active hunter and angler who enjoys writing about his outdoor experiences. He is a regular contributor to the Northern Virginia journal newspapers and national outdoor magazines.*

At least two commercial gunning operations have sprung up in Northern Virginia, where resident goose populations are at all-time highs. Both have access to thousands of acres of prime property. Most days, hunters limit out well before noon.

Western Loudoun Outfitters  
(540) 668-6133

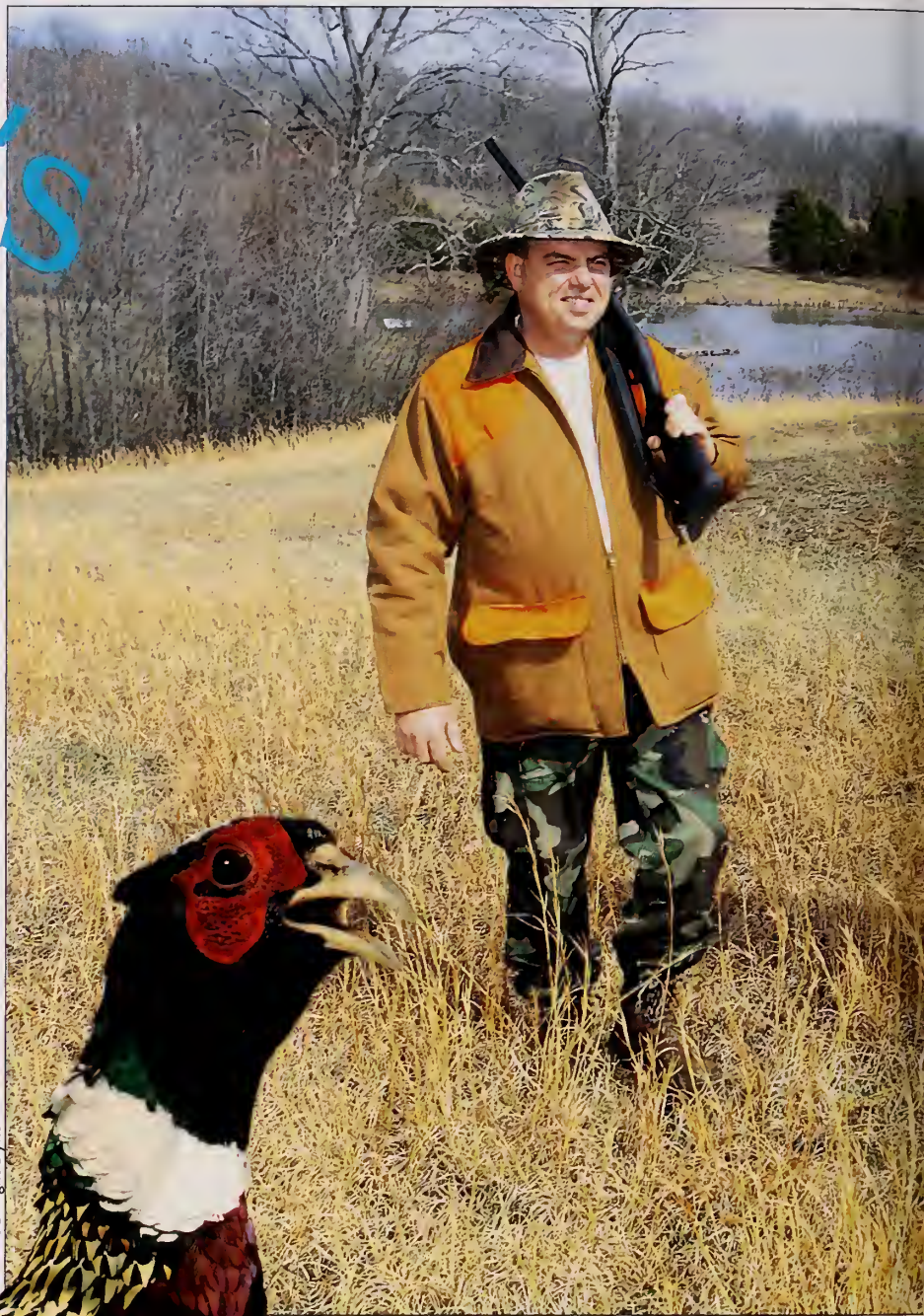
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# Virginia's



Are you looking  
for something  
different this  
hunting season?

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by Bob Gooch

**"I** like mixed-bag hunts," said Rick Hunsucker as Chris McCotter and I were checking out after a successful hunt for chukars and quail on his popular shooting preserve. We had also put up a cackling cock pheasant, but couldn't get a shot. "We released some hunks," he added, but our dogs hadn't located any Hungarian partridge. One reason undoubtedly was that the chukars and quail had kept my two English setters Freck

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE



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*Shooting preserves (above) offer easy access, longer seasons, and are excellent locations for training your dog or introducing a youngster to hunting. Ring-necked pheasants (right) along with quail and chukar give hunters a variety of upland game birds to choose from.*

and Jim too busy to really hunt for other game. Our time was also limited. A couple of hours of fast shooting and we were forced to call it a day.

That late winter hunt and our brief visit with the shooting preserve manager says a lot about the opportunities offered by Virginia's excellent spread of private shooting preserves.

We had enjoyed some excellent hunting and wingshooting late in February, long after the regular hunting seasons were over. Quail hunting had ended in January and even the grouse hunting was over by the middle of February. Shooting preserve seasons are long. They open September 1, and continue through April, eight long months of hunting, though all operators do not take advantage of the extended season. "September's too hot and too much green vegetation is still around," one veteran operator told



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me. Many, however, do open their preserves September 1, with the beginning of a new season.

In addition to the longer season is the advantage that shooting preserves offer by being open for Sunday hunting, thanks to a fairly recent liberalization of the Virginia law, which otherwise prohibits hunting on Sunday. This gives hunters who may work six days a week an opportunity to squeeze some hunting into their busy schedules. Translated, that means hunting everyday be-

tween September 1, and April 30. Plenty of opportunity to keep your dogs active and into birds, the work they were bred and live for.

Let's consider for a minute Hunsucker's reference to mixed-bag hunts. "They add an element of surprise or suspense," he said. Some shooting preserves stock quail only. Some hunters prefer that. They are died-in-the-wool bobwhite hunters who grew up hunting quail, training their dogs on quail, loading their fine shotguns for quail, and are not really interested in other game birds. Others, however, like the greater variety, the chance to hunt other game birds, particularly ring-necked pheasants. Attempts to introduce this exciting bird to Virginia's native game bird population have all failed, but the preserve birds are exciting and they offer a golden opportunity to hunt this exciting bird from the Orient. Having hunted wild ones in South Dakota and other pheasant states, I see little difference between them and the preserve birds. Hungarian partridge and chukars may hold less fascination for many bird hunters, but they too can be exciting, and the chance to hunt all four at the same time! That's the appeal Hunsucker was talking about. Your dogs go on a sharp point and you move up behind them. What's going to suddenly be in the air out there to challenge your shooting skills? A cackling cock pheasant resplendent in its colorful plumage, a buzzing little brown bombshell of a bobwhite, a hun that on wing can be hard to distinguish from a bobwhite, or an exotic chukar much bigger than a bobwhite and much smaller than a pheasant. I doubt that there is any wild bird hunting anywhere that offers that challenge. The ranges of the various birds or their habitat do not overlap to that degree. Bobwhite quail are native to America and Virginia, but chukars, huns, and pheasants are exotic, all introduced from foreign lands. All have found niches for themselves in America, but in different parts of the country. But well-managed shooting preserves bring them together



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for fine, mixed-bag hunting and often on only a few hundred acres of land.

I've hunted shooting preserves off and on for a number of years, primarily to extend my season back when hunting for wild quail was good. Now, however, I hunt them to keep my dogs in birds at a time when there are so few wild ones and because I enjoy hunting. In the process I've watched the quality of the pen-raised birds improve dramatically. The breeders are learning from years of experience, and are doing a better job of producing birds that more nearly resemble their wild kin. One quality I've noted recently is a tendency for the pen-raised birds to head for the nearest cover when flushed. Rather than simply dropping down again following a brief flight, which display strong native instincts.



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*Hunters who have limited time to spend outdoors and are not willing to travel great distances will find shooting preserves a convenient alternative.*

Probably the major attraction of shooting preserves is the abundance of game. As long as the breeders can keep their incubators going and turning out quail, pheasants, chukars, and huns there is no shortage of game. In recent years, however, the sharply increasing popularity of shooting preserve hunting, has apparently been placing some stress on the breeders. Some operators report difficulty finding birds. The old economic problem of supply and demand. A few operators are even rearing their own birds, but running a busy shooting preserve is a full-time job in itself. Few have any desire to spread themselves beyond that.

With Virginia's population growing rapidly and gobbling up land, finding a place to hunt is becoming increasingly difficult. Much of the private land that is available for

public hunting is tied up in hunting leases, or by families who like to retain hunting rights for themselves and their friends. Posted or no hunting signs, once rare in Virginia, are common. But even where there is land open for hunting, a reluctance to knock on doors and ask strangers for permission to hunt is part of human nature. Permission often comes somewhat reluctantly, an attitude that bothers many hunters, "I could tell they didn't really want me hunting their property even though they gave me permission." Some hunters are bold, but too many are somewhat shy. While the bold find places to hunt, the shy shrug their shoulders and give up. Shooting preserves can solve this problem. You pay a modest fee and forget about asking for permission from often reluctant landowners.

Shooting preserves are like

stocked trout waters. You know there will be game waiting for you. But you still have to find it, and shoot well if it's going to end up in your game pockets. Your dogs have to work the cover well, find the game, hold it with steady points, and help you locate it when it's down. The weather remains a factor. Rain, snow, wind, cold weather, hot weather, all are going to have some effect on your hunting. To be successful you are going to have to make adjustments for the weather. Scenting conditions will vary between a cold wet day and a dry hot one. Your hunting know-how and that of your dogs get tested, but you *know* the game is there. You just have to know how to hunt for it. You never encounter the present-day problem of hunting wild quail where there is a good possibility that there are no birds, a situation that



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*Extend your hunting season by visiting one of Virginia's shooting preserves. The rewards are numerous.*

discourages both hunters and dogs. Many bird hunters who have sold their dogs and turned to some other kind of hunting would never have done so if they had been willing to accept shooting preserve hunting. "I'll give up hunting before I'll hunt those birds that are raised like chickens." When I hear a hunter say that, I often wonder if he has ever tried hunting on a modern shooting preserve.

Want to go wild pheasant hunting? It's a three-day drive to South Dakota. Or chukars? You won't find them much closer than the arid country of the West. And huns? I traveled to North Dakota for the birds though there are reportedly some wild ones in upstate New York. The beauty is that you can find all three of these birds, plus plenty of quail, on shooting preserves right here in the Old Dominion. You can eat a quick lunch at home, pick up a hunting partner, hunt a nearby preserve, and be home for dinner. On that February trip McCotter and I hunted only two hours and went home with full game pockets. Sure you paid a modest fee, but not nearly what it would have cost you to travel to South Dakota, Idaho, or even upstate New York. No giving up days of vacation time, no long hours on the road, and no steady restaurant diet, or dull evenings in motels.

Most shooting preserves offer guide service and dogs for an additional fee, of course. This is a tremendous boost for the hunter who lives in an apartment and has no way of keeping a dog. There are hunters who find themselves, at least temporarily, in this position and may have given up hunting birds for that reason. If so a nearby shooting preserve is the answer. That is not my case, nor does it apply to many other hunters who own good dogs and enjoy them. They hunt preserves for another reason. It's partly for the good of their dogs, an opportunity to expose them to birds they might not otherwise get a whiff of in many weeks.

Cost is, of course, a consideration, but you can take the money you have set aside for an out-of-state trip and enjoy many fine shooting preserve hunts. Some preserves offer club memberships, a certain number of hunts per season, at a reduced cost. It's worth looking into. If there is a negative here, it's that you will be doing all of your hunting on a single preserve.

There's no way I'm going to give up my dogs. Working with them, watching them develop from mere pups to mature dogs, having them handle birds, and respond to the changing field conditions is a big part of the reason I hunt. While I admire most pointing dogs, there is no substitute for hunting with your own dogs. But when you weigh the cost of buying or raising dogs, training them or having them trained, veterinary care, and feeding them all year, the total cost would pay for any number of shooting preserve hunts. This might be worth taking into consideration when debating gun dog ownership. In the long run it might be less expensive to book a season of hunts including guides and dogs, enjoy the outings, the shooting, and the work of someone else's dogs. That's a possibility, but not for me. At least at the present.

The hunting opportunities vary

by preserve. Some may offer quail hunting only, but others a full slate of upland bird hunting you can choose from. European style continental, or driven pheasant shoots are also popular. Some also offer deer hunting in addition to various kinds of bird hunting.

A frequent approach is to establish a club and allow members only to hunt. Archery ranges, many with 3-D targets set up under natural conditions, are sometimes available to hunters as well as archers.

Of more importance, particularly to bird hunters, are skeet and sporting clays ranges that give hunters a chance to sharpen their shooting skills before heading into the field. "Our sporting clays range is open all summer," said one preserve operator. Many shooters enjoy sporting clays for the pure joy of shooting, some who do not even hunt.

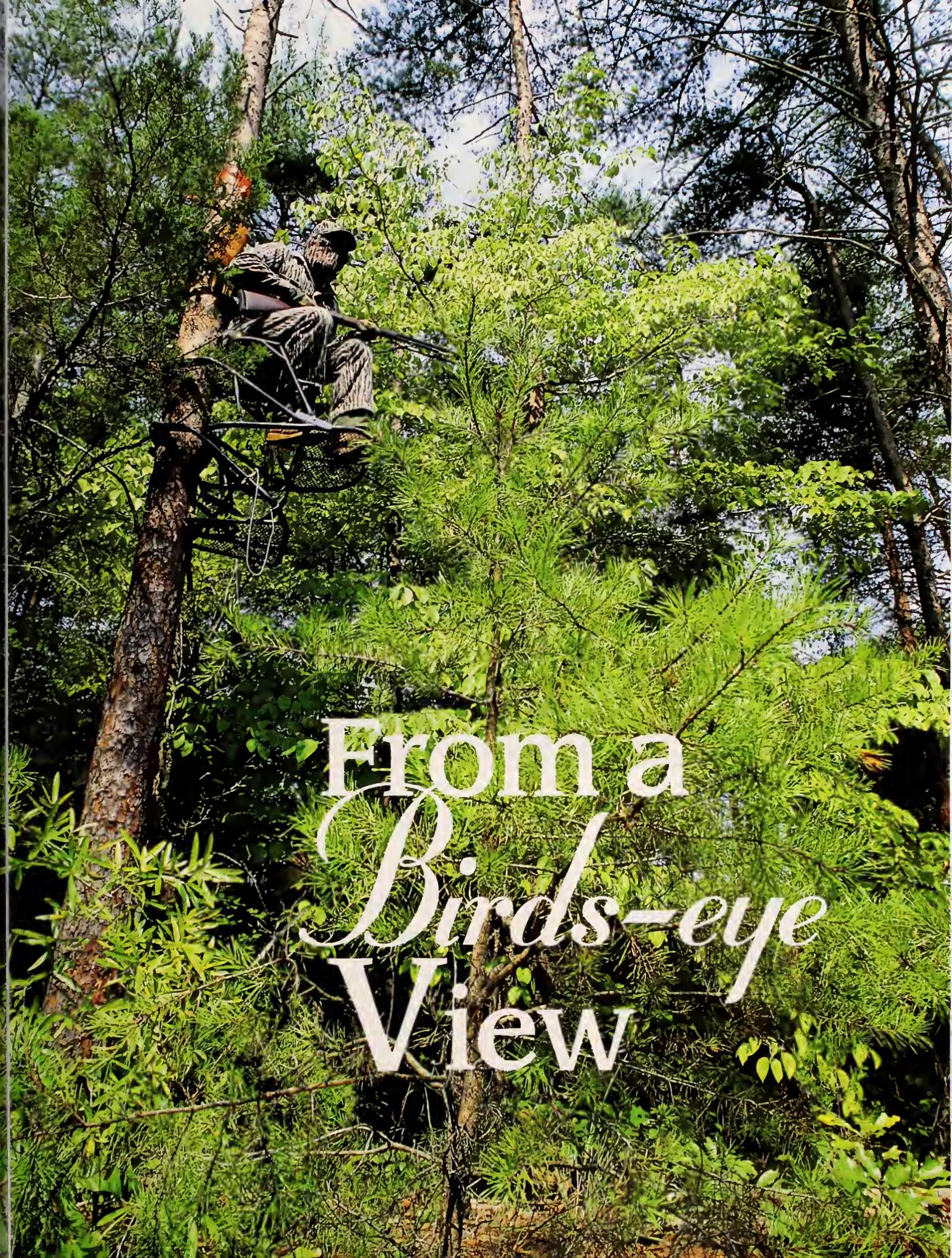
For additional information on licensed shooting preserves in Virginia, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Information Office, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104, (804) 367-9369. □

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*Bob Gooch has been writing about hunting and fishing in Virginia for over 30 years and is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife.*



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A photograph of a person sitting in a tree stand high up in a forest. The person is wearing a hat and a jacket, and is looking down. The forest is dense with green trees and foliage. The text "From a B. Birds-eye View" is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

From a  
*B.* Birds-eye  
View



## Elevated stands are giving deer hunters a new outlook on an age-old sport.

by Denny Quaiff

**A**fter climbing into my stand at first light, the heavy frost that covered the ground was slowly becoming visible. I had carefully positioned the elevated platform three months before in a one-year old, soon to be reforested clear cut. This was the first time that I had returned to the tripod and I was confident the stand would be rock-solid. The most important thing to learn about hunting from elevated stands is that safety comes first, and all necessary pre-

cautions were taken when the platform was set up.

My stand was facing north overlooking a creek bottom that was lined with hardwood trees, bordering a bedding area of a 10-year old pine plantation. This was the last day of the 1997 special early muzzleloading season, and I was hoping to fill a buck tag. Suddenly the movement of three deer in the creek bottom caught my attention. A closer look with the binoculars revealed a big doe and her two fawns. Over the next 15 minutes the three animals browsed their way within 10 yards of my stand and continued



shooter. I felt sure that he would walk within close gun range for my muzzleloading rifle. However, he must have felt something wasn't just right as he disappeared from my line of sight.

Hoping to bring him back up the hill for a shot I started working my grunt tube to make him think another buck had moved in on his territory. Within seconds he was there again, standing in the same spot staring straight at me. The stand-off between the two of us lasted for several minutes. All of a sudden, the buck turned broadside and started walking off the hill. My instinct told me that this elusive animal wouldn't be fooled twice as I shouldered my black powder rifle and fired.

This successful hunt would never have happened without patience and the aid of my tripod stand. Today manufacturers are building all types of stands in order to accommodate any and all situations hunters may confront.

It would be impossible for one stand to fit all hunting needs. Those of us who have been around for awhile have found more than one section of timber where the trees were too big for a portable climber but a ladder would be just what the doctor ordered. At other times there are no trees and only a freestanding platform will do the job.

An elevated platform is another hunting tool. Quality construction of these stands play a major role in safety and hunter success. Over the past 25 plus years I have tried almost every type of portable and semi-portable stand built. I must testify that my first climber and chain on tree stands were made by a friend. After a couple of close calls with these homemade units I learned quickly to depend solely on commercially produced stands.

My checklist of requirements when purchasing an elevated stand is for it to be hunter safe, user friendly, comfortable and effective for my hunting needs. The stands that will be reviewed in this article are units that I have personally hunted from.

over the next ridge. It has been my experience that whitetails pay little attention to these freestanding units that are in the open, and the wind was in my favor.

Aware of the fact the rut was in full swing I watched and waited. While continuing to glass the low grounds with my binoculars, a tall rack buck came into view. Within a second he was out of sight. Feeling sure he was trailing the old doe that had come through earlier, I got ready. All of a sudden there he stood looking straight at my stand from a hundred yards down the hill.

It was no question that he was a

## 10 Tree Stand Safety Tips

by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Hunter Education Safety Program

**1.** Use portable rather than permanent tree stands, as they reduce damage to trees and afford the hunter flexibility in moving the stand location.

**2.** Tell someone where you will be hunting. Leave a note at your vehicle detailing your location, so someone will be able to find you if you do not return.

**3.** Securely attach the tree stand no higher than you feel comfortable in jumping safely from the tree.

**4.** Use a safety belt to secure yourself to the tree. Harnesses made for this purpose are much safer than rope.

**5.** Use an equipment haul line to get your unloaded gun or bow into or out of the stand. Never climb with equipment.

**6.** Keep your tree stand in good working condition, replacing any worn or missing parts.

**7.** Practice using your tree stand close to the ground to become familiar on how it reacts to your body weight and movement.

**8.** Thoroughly inspect a permanent tree stand from a previous season and make any necessary repairs. Decaying wood and natural tree growth could make permanent stands unsafe.

**9.** Select straight, live tree stand sites, inspecting for bee's nests and animal dens and dead wood before erecting the stand.

**10.** Stay awake. A common cause of tree stand accidents is falling asleep. Don't climb a tree after taking medication that makes you drowsy. If you start to nod off, get to the ground immediately.



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*Portable climbing stands (top) have come a long way over the last few years. They have been reduced in weight making them easier to carry and to set up. Ladder stands (above) are a good alternative to climbing or hang-on stands. They take little time to set up and are easy to get in or out of.*

## Portable Climbing Tree Stands

The first style of stands on the market that I can remember were climbers. These early models were nothing like the modern day designs. Some were extremely heavy, noisy, and awkward to use. It was also common knowledge if hunters were not real careful, they just might find themselves taking an unexpected fall.

Today's self-climbing tree stands have come a long way. Modern day models have been reduced in weight, have increased platform size and are built for comfort.

My choice for a climbing tree stand comes from Trophy Whitetail Products. This manufacturer makes climbers for gun hunters, bow hunters and a combo stand for the two season hunter.

All Trophy Whitetail Tree Stands are built strong with safety in mind. The roomy platform area is designed for hunters to safely stand in order to take shots from different angles. Each stand has a padded back and seat cushion for long hours in the tree. Sportsmen can easily move the climber to a new location by backpacking the stand. It only weighs 21 pounds.

Trophy Whitetail Tree Stands are easy to use with their sit down/stand up climbing mode. For example, a friend's father still hunted from one of these climbers at age 72.

## Hang-On Stands

Of the basic tree stand styles that are most often found in outdoor sports shops today, hang-on types are generally the least expensive. Many hunters use these models as an alternative to a climber. These units are usually lighter, smaller and require less effort for the deep-woods deer hunters.

Loc-On is one of the oldest tree stands on the market and has become a household name. Their hang-on platform is one of the most widely used stands of its kind by bow hunters and gun hunters alike.

The hang-on style stands are better designed for the younger more agile hunter. I have found that these semi-portable stands have their place and continue to be popular among deer hunters throughout the country.

## Ladder Stands

Ladder style stands will work almost anywhere trees grow. These semi-permanent ladder platforms can fit the needs of hunters, young and old. When securely set-up, ladder stands offer stability that help to make this style of tree stand user friendly for both bow and gun hunters.

Strong Built has a basic ladder stand that has served me well. This stand comes in 15 and 19-foot eye level heights. It is mid-range in price and should fit into most budgets. The company also offers an optional shooting rest for gun hunters.

Trax America is a company that I have been working with over the past several years. Their ladder stands are built for easy entrance and exit. The company's 11 foot Penthouse is built for hunters to feel secure with its roomy platform and comfortable seat. The company's published load capacity of 350 pounds will handle a big man and all of his equipment.

Deer hunters can almost always find a place where only a ladder stand will fit the bill. It is my opinion that ladder stands will never go out of style.

## Free Standing Units

It has only been in recent years that I was able to effectively hunt the open areas on my hunting leases. This was quite a problem with tim-



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ber companies clear-cutting pine trees on a 20-year rotation. Knowing that the deer were living in these open areas I determined a tripod stand was my only realistic option.

I now own and hunt from several tripod stands made by Strong Built. These stands come in 12, 14 and 16-foot eye level heights. The stand comes with a big platform and a 360 degree swivel seat for mobility and comfort. I have added pipe insulation to the shooting rails on all of my stands to reduce noise and guard against unwanted scratches to my favorite deer rifle.

Another first-rate fully enclosed four-legged tower stand is being manufactured by RealBark Hunting Systems. This elevated round blind made of thermoplastic is available in

comfort and safety that is second-to-none.

All of my freestanding platforms are securely set in place. Each unit has a screw anchor in the ground below the platform. A steel cable with a turnbuckle to tighten the stand down is attached to the anchor. This all but guarantees, that short of a tornado, these units will withstand any weather conditions Mother Nature has to offer.

## Safety First

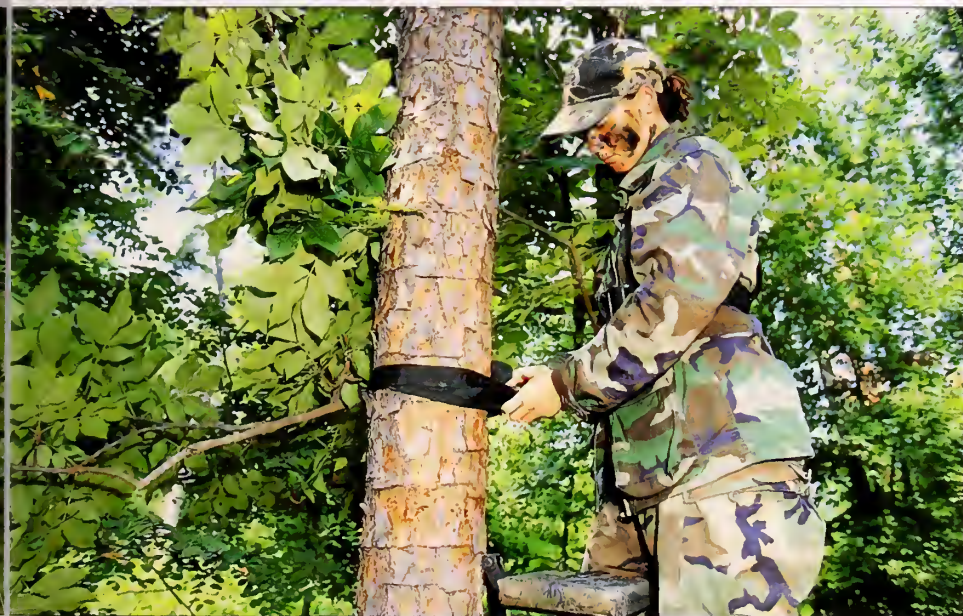
Safety should always be your primary concern when hunting from tree stands or elevated platforms. The selection of elevated hunting stands that are manufactured today are almost unlimited and the ones covered in this article are only a tip of the iceberg.

The best suggestion one can offer to anyone planning to invest in a stand would be to check it out in person. Do not totally rely on ads you see or articles you read. Consider visiting one of the outdoor shows that are held throughout the state, or contact the manufacturer to see where the nearest dealer is located who handles the stand that interests you.

After purchasing a stand, hunters should carefully read the manufacturer's instructions. Take the time to completely familiarize yourself with the stand. This should also include several practice secessions before opening day. Always remember to use a safety belt or harness when climbing or hunting from an elevated platform, your life may depend upon it.

Every hunting season hunters are involved in tree stand accidents that should have never taken place. If there is one simple piece of advice I can offer to everyone, it would be to use good old common sense to help ensure a safe and enjoyable hunting experience. □

*Denny Quaiff is executive editor of Whitetail Times magazine, and a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife.*



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*Open areas that are void of trees (top) are perfect for free standing platforms. The added elevation gives the hunter a greater perspective, and an added measure of safety. No matter what kind of elevated stand you choose (above) safety is the key to any successful hunting trip.*

4 or 6 foot diameter. Each stand has three Quiet-Glide plexiglass windows that lift vertically. The windows are mounted inside on glides to prevent freezing and ensure quiet and consistent operation year after year. These stands come with padded swivel seats and indoor-outdoor carpet on a three quarter-inch plywood floor.

RealBark Tower Blinds come in 5, 10 and 15-foot heights. This elevated hunting blind offers today's hunter



# Journal



## 1999 Game Warden of the Year

by Julia Dixon Smith

Sergeant Steve Pike, of Bedford County, has been named the 1999 Game Warden of the Year. Sergeant Pike joined the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) in 1988 and was promoted to the rank of sergeant in 1993. VDGIF Director William L. Woodfin, Jr. said of Sergeant Pike, "Steve serves as an excellent example for his fellow officers. He has worked with citizen volunteers and local businesses to develop several innovative programs. We are proud of the numerous contributions he has made and continues to make."

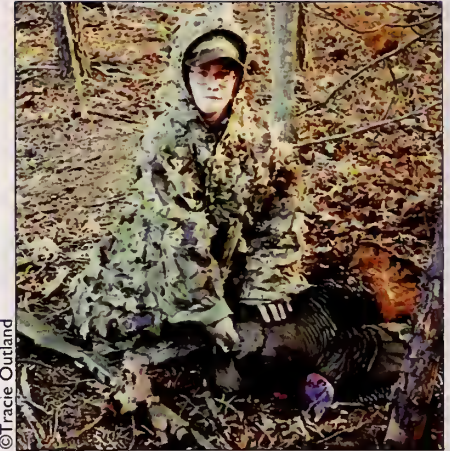
Some of Steve Pike's accomplishments include the development of the first personal flotation device loaner program for children at Smith Mountain Lake. His involvement with Bedford County, where he is assigned, is extensive. He started a citizen-based organization to combat poaching in the county. He serves on the board of the Smith Mountain Lake Water Safety Council; speaks each year to the Liberty

High School advanced studies class on the role of the game warden and works with the Bedford City and County Recreation Department along with private businesses to provide youth fishing clinics. He founded the Bedford County Sportsmen, Inc., a group that works to educate the community about wildlife and conservation issues pertaining to Bedford County.

Over the years he has been trained in a variety of courses, progressed into advanced courses and eventually became an instructor. Currently, Sergeant Pike serves as the Officer Survival Instructor for the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Training Academy; Chief Boating Instructor of the Department; and Boat Accident Reconstruction Instructor for Department in-service training. He is also a guest instructor in Boat Accident Reconstruction for the Virginia Marine Resource Commission.

In 1994, Sergeant Pike was the first recipient from the Department to receive the Law Enforcement Award from Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. In 1997, the James River Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation presented him with an award for outstanding law enforcement efforts. In nominating him for 1999 Game Warden of the Year, Captain John Heslep noted, "Sergeant Pike goes above and beyond the call of duty to promote the mission of the Department. His excellent work ethic, leadership skills, and extra efforts to serve the citizens of the Commonwealth exemplify the Virginia Game Warden."

Sergeant Pike will be presented the award at the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies conference in Greensboro, North Carolina this fall. □



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## Letters to the Editor

*Recently we received a letter from Andrew Shelton from Midland, Virginia. Andrew, who is 12 years old, wrote asking if we would share his exciting tale with you. His letter begins by describing his first turkey hunt, which took place this last spring. I think you will agree Andrew has something really big to smile about.*

### My First Turkey Hunt

Before daylight, my stepfather Earl and I woke and headed out. Our destination was the woods behind a friend's house. Not many people are allowed to hunt there, so we felt really lucky. We walked down a path and started calling. All of a sudden a gobbler called back. "Andy, you hear that?" Earl said.

"Yeah," I said slowly and thoughtful like. Again we heard it. We decided he was across the road, but we were wrong. We waited in there expecting to see the gobbler any minute. We made another call, scaring up two hens. Then not 30 yards from us the gobbler let out a mighty call. We quickly scuttled down and two more hens walked through. I'm sure they saw us.

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All the while in the heat of the hunt we were calling and that gobbler was hollering back. Then all of a sudden in full strut he appeared right in front of me. I could see that red, blue and white head as he moved right for us. I was shaking badly. He would gobble and ruffle his feathers, then stick his head up and look around. I'm sure he was looking at me to make sure I was a bush.

I knew where I was going to take the shot, right in the opening between two trees. As he stepped out strutting his stuff, I slowly put the bead on him and squeezed the trigger, all the while shaking. He flopped over once and fell down. The shot was 40 yards and Earl thought I had missed, but when we reached him he was dead. I was so happy I about screamed and I was filled with joy.

Twenty years from now when I am old and 32, I'll look back at this special time and smile. By the way my gobbler weighed 22 pounds, with an inch and a quarter spurs and his beard was 10 1/2 inches. □

## Operation Spruce-Up

by Bonnie Phillips

Governor Gilmore's Operation Spruce-Up '99 resulted in another successful spring cleanup in Virginia. Over 400 projects were registered with more than 15,000 volunteers working to improve their communities, pick up trash, improve wildlife habitat, and work on land and water restoration projects. Educational components were incorporated into many of the projects, enabling children to get hands-on learning experiences.

For example, fifth graders from Charles City Elementary School toured the Harrison Lake Fish Hatchery, learned about Virginia's native fish, the food chain, and enjoyed fishing while being reminded of good conservation practices! Ann Skalski, with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, helped promote the event by bringing fish-

ing gear and teaching the children how to fish. They were joined by community volunteers as well as state and local government employees. Lieutenant Governor John Hager, David Brickley, the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Charles City County Supervisor, Floyd Miles, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff and representatives from the Disabled Veterans of America, cut the ribbon dedicating the new fishing piers, which are handicapped accessible.

The Fall River Renaissance campaign is underway so join in the fun! Don't forget to take your camera while you're cruising the lakes and rivers this summer. The deadline to enter the Fall River Renaissance Photo Contest is October 31, 1999. "Favorite Virginia Waterways" and "Volunteers in Motion" are the themes for this year's contest. Peg Childress won the Operation Spruce-Up contest and received a free weekend getaway at a state park cabin of her choice. Call Mike Ostrander, at Richmond Camera, for details at (804) 648-0515, or visit our website at <http://www.state.va.us/~dcr/temp/frhome.htm>. For more information on Fall River Renaissance, call Bonnie Phillips, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation at (804) 786-5056 (in the Richmond area) or 1-800-933-Park.

## Hats Off to the James River Chapter of Quail Unlimited

by Jay Jeffreys, Wildlife Biologist, Region 2

Last summer the James River Chapter of Quail Unlimited teamed-up with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to purchase a Truax warm season grass drill. The James River Chapter, located in Lynchburg, generously donated over \$6,300 toward the purchase of this drill. This donation covered over two-thirds of the cost of the drill. This specialized drill is now located at the White Oak Management Area and is provided, free of charge, to any landowner in the southwestern Piedmont area wishing to establish native warm season grasses.

The bobwhite quail is a species that thrives in early successional habitat. During the past 40 years, both the quality and quantity of early successional habitat has declined significantly. At the same time there has been a large decline in quail numbers. One method of providing this early successional environment is to plant native warm season grasses (WSG). These grasses offer excellent nesting and brood rearing cover for quail because they are bunch grasses. When included as a forage base on a cattle farm, the



warm season grasses are mowed or grazed much later than cool season grasses, providing for greater nest success. The James River Chapter recognizes the need for improved quail habitat, and in an effort to help revitalize quail populations, aided in the purchase of this WSG drill.

The drill was first put into operation this past spring and used extensively through the early summer. In cooperation with nine private landowners, the drill was used to plant approximately 100 acres of native warm season grasses. Over two-thirds of 100 acres were planted solely for wildlife purposes. These grasses are not only beneficial to bobwhite quail, but also many grassland songbirds and small mammals. The remaining one-third of the acreage will be used as forage on beef cattle farms.

In addition to this drill, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries owns four other WSG drills, all of which are available to private or public landowners. In combination, these five drills were responsible for converting over 1100 acres of land to warm season grasses during the 1999 planting season. It is important to remember that the use of these drills is on a first come, first serve basis. Anyone interested in using the WSG drill should contact their Regional or Field Office of DGIF at the numbers listed below. Contacts should be made early in the calendar year.

#### Regional Offices

Williamsburg (757) 253-4180  
Forest (804) 525-7522  
Marion (540) 783-4860  
Verona (540) 248-9360  
Fredericksburg (540) 899-4169

#### Field Offices

Powhatan (804) 598-3706  
Farmville (804) 392-9645

## Seventh Annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival October 8-10, 1999

Each autumn thousands of migrating neotropical songbirds and

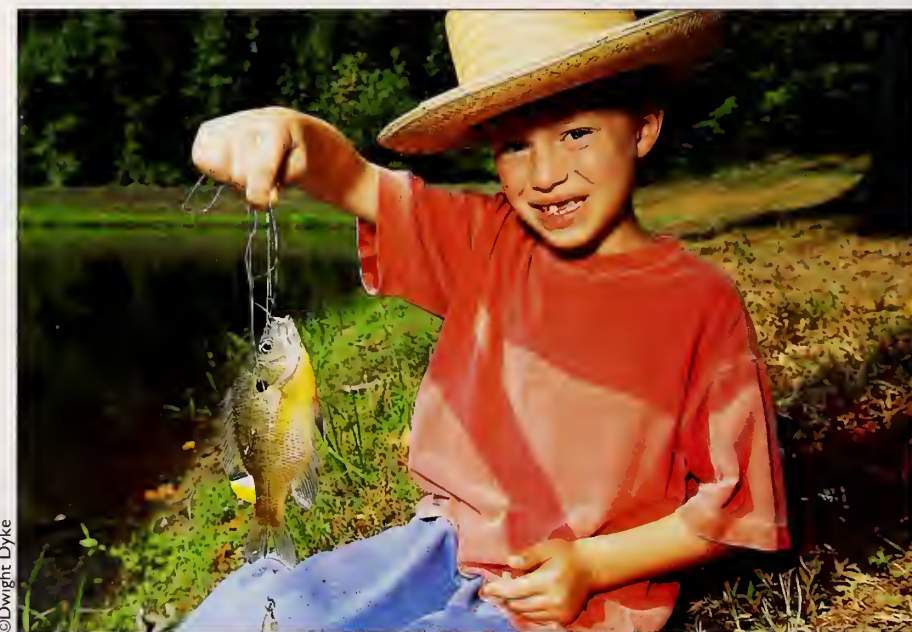


raptors stage along the tip of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. This unique location allows them a chance to rest on their winter migration to a warmer climate. For people who enjoy being in the outdoors and especially those who love to watch birds this is a cause for celebration.

Beginning on Friday, October 8th and lasting through Sunday the 10th, a host of scheduled events will take place commemorating this unusual event. Close to 20 different nature workshops will be offered including nature hikes and canoeing. In the area of the Sunset Beach Inn, local artists will exhibit numerous

arts and crafts. Visitors will also have an opportunity to observe actual bird banding and have a chance to see hawks, eagles, and falcons at the Hawk Observatory near the entrance to Kiptopeke State Park.

This is your chance to get up-close and personal with our feathery friends and with the people who devote countless hours working to help insure their survival. For further information on how you can attend the 7th Annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival, contact: The Eastern Shore Of Virginia Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 460, Melfa, VA 23410, (757) 787-2460



National Hunting & Fishing Day, September 25, 1999  
"A Natural Invitation to Step Outdoors"



# On The Water

by Jim Crosby, Boating Education Coordinator, Region I

## The Latest on Visual Distress Signals



©Dwight Dyke

**V**isual Distress Signals, flares, flags and strobe lights should be a practical and necessary part of your watercraft's safety equipment.

Visual Distress Signals (VDS) are required on vessels operating in coastal waters and waters directly connected to them up to a point where the body of water becomes less than two miles wide. When you add up all the boats covered by this regulation and multiply that by the number of VDS carried aboard those vessels, that is a great number of VDS and a large industry.

What will you find when you set out to purchase VDS for your watercraft? You will find a long list and confusing array of items from which to choose. Definitely, just the right moment to seek a little guidance from a well-established authority.

The *Virginia Watercraft Owner's*

*Guide* states, "Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals must be U.S. Coast Guard approved, in serviceable condition and stowed to be readily accessible. They are marked with a date showing the serviceable life, and this date must not have passed. Launchers produced before January 1, 1981, intended for use with approved signals are not required to be Coast Guard approved."

In addition, there are non-pyrotechnic devices but they must also carry the manufacturer's certification that they meet Coast Guard requirements. They also must be in serviceable condition and stowed to be readily accessible. They include an orange signal flag with a black square and a black ball, for use in daylight only; and an electric distress light (strobe light) for night use. An ordinary flashlight is not accept-

able since it must be manually flashed and does not normally produce enough candlepower.

No single device is ideal under all conditions and for all purposes. You should, therefore, consider carrying several types. An aerial flare can be used to attract attention and a hand-held flare can be used to direct rescue to your vessel. The distress flag is especially useful for an aerial search because it will single out your vessel as being the distressed one from all others in the vicinity. Some manufacturers sell convenient, self-contained kits that offer a variety of devices to meet this need.

Do not test your pyrotechnic devices. It is illegal to discharge a VDS in a non-emergency situation. When they expire, you should consider retaining them aboard for backup. If your accumulation exceeds what's reasonable, contact the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and offer to donate them for training purposes. Otherwise, you must take them to your local hazardous waste authority. Recent tests conducted by Boat/US have proved that outdated VDS don't necessarily perform up to specifications and may not perform at all. So, make sure your VDS are all within the serviceable condition date and only count the outdated ones as backup.

The last word on VDS has to be this: Even if you do not normally boat where they are legally required, you should consider them a necessary part of your safety equipment. One can be just as hard-pressed to seek attention in an emergency on an inland lake as the Chesapeake Bay. □

# RECIPES

by Joan Cone



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Now that Virginia has a resident Canada goose season with a generous bag limit, you might be receiving one of these local birds from a hunting friend.

Recently I was the recipient of one, evidently an old goose. They can live up to 25 years! After preparing it in an oven bag, which is a favorite method of mine, the breast was edible, but the thighs and legs were too tough. Not wanting to waste any meat, I recooked all but the breast in a pressure cooker which guarantees tender meat. After removing the meat from the bones, I used it in the following recipe which was a huge success.

## Menu

Curried Zucchini Soup  
Goose Cacciatore  
Broccoli-Peanut Salad  
Marika's Applesauce Cake

### Curried Zucchini Soup

- 1 large onion, halved lengthwise and cut into thin half-moons
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon curry powder or to taste
- Salt to taste
- 1 pound small zucchini, ends trimmed, cut lengthwise then crosswise into 1-inch pieces
- 1 quart chicken stock or broth

## How to Enjoy a Tough Goose

In a heavy 6-quart saucepan, combine onion, oil, curry and salt. Stir to coat onions. Cook over low heat, stirring until onions are soft, 3 to 4 minutes. Add zucchini and cook until soft. Add stock or broth and stir to blend. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Using a hand blender, puree soup directly in the pan or puree in a food processor. Taste for seasoning. Serves 4 to 6.

### \*Goose Cacciatore

- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 8 ounces fresh mushrooms, quartered
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes, cut up
- 2 cups (8 ounces) chopped cooked goose
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 1½ teaspoons dried Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 6 cups hot cooked rice

In a 4-quart saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add mushrooms, onion and garlic. Cook for 5 to 6 minutes or until vegetables are tender, stirring occasionally. Stir in remaining ingredients except rice. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Cover and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer 45 minutes to 1 hour, or until goose is tender, stirring occasionally. Serve goose mixture over rice. Makes 6 servings.

### Broccoli-Peanut Salad

- 1½ pounds fresh broccoli
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimiento, drained
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup dry roasted peanuts
- ½ cup mayonnaise or salad dressing
- 2 tablespoons honey

Trim off large leaves of broccoli and remove tough ends of lower stalks. Wash broccoli thoroughly. Cut stalks into ¼-inch slices. Cut remaining broccoli into flowerets and place in a large bowl. Add pimiento, raisins and peanuts. Combine mayonnaise and honey and spoon over top. Toss gently to coat. Cover and chill for 2 hours. Makes 6 servings.

### Marika's Applesauce Cake

*This recipe was sent to me by Marika L. Byrd who is with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.*

- 2½ cups flour
- 1 cup each of brown and white sugar
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1¾ cups unsweetened applesauce
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 eggs
- 1½ cups chopped walnuts or pecans, roasted
- 1 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease and flour a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan. Dredge nuts and raisins with ¼ cup of the total flour and set aside. Measure all ingredients in a large mixer bowl and blend until fully mixed, scraping the bowl frequently. Add nut-raisin mixture and continue mixing until well mixed. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake 35 to 45 minutes or until cake tests done when a cake tester is inserted in middle and comes out clean.

**Note:** Substitute 1 cup of Craisins™ for a different taste

\*This recipe is from *Game Bird Cookery*, published by Cowles Creative Publishing, Inc., 1997.

# September Afield

by Jack Randolph

Some years ago while on patrol with the late Garland Foster a fellow with a rather dubious reputation for obeying wildlife laws said, "Mr. Foster, what we need is another month of huntin' season."

Garland looked at him with his famous wry smile on his face and said dryly, "If you had another month, what would you call it? You're already hunting 12 months a year."

September is sort of like that odd month. It's probably more the last month of summer than the first one of autumn, but we generally think of it as the first month of fall. Of course, this is the month the vacations end and the kids go back to school and lots of folks make the mistake of hanging up their fishing tackle for the season when the best fishing of the year is yet to come.

For many years now, September has become popular among sportsmen. For most, it marks the opening of dove and rail seasons, but in recent years we have seen more hunting opportunities this month with the opening of the resident Canada goose season, an early teal season and a squirrel season in the southern tier of counties.

With the archery deer season coming on swiftly and the short early duck season weeks away, smart hunters will use September to scout out the best locations. This is also the last opportunity to practice using your portable tree stand, something that many hunters overlook, sometimes with dire consequences.

September is the time for licensing duck blinds, and for sending in applications for the special hunts offered by the Virginia Department of

Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia State Parks, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunters are reminded that a Hunter Safety Certificate must be obtained to participate on many of the special hunts.

For the freshwater fisherman this is prime time to catch smallmouth bass in the several excellent, small-



©Lloyd B. Hill

mouth bass rivers found in the state. It is not well known, but September can be a crackerjack month for catching big largemouth bass. Last year, for example, September produced a 14 1/2-pound bass at Briery Creek Lake, a 12 pounder at Lake Notoway and a 11 pound largemouth at Amelia Lake. This month is about the last call for bream on the ponds and reservoirs.

Alerted by the shortening days, many species of saltwater fish are getting ready to return to winter quarters. Cobia are still around, but more and more are showing up around the buoys at the mouth of the bay, as they make ready to depart.

During the latter part of the month red drum will appear in the surf off the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore and more and more puppy drum will be caught from the piers and in the inlets. Some anglers like to fish Lynnhaven Inlet for puppy drum on a northeast wind this month.

Both croakers and spot are wearing their golden colors this month as they start their migration to their offshore spawning grounds. Flounder fishing should also hold angler's interest.

Last September the Spanish mackerel were so thick in the bay off of Reedville, some fishermen called them the "Spanish Armada." Schools of tailor bluefish added to the fun.

Offshore fishing can be outstanding this month, particularly for white marlin. How good it is often depends on whether or not a hurricane visits us. All it takes is a near miss by a hurricane to bring the marlin fishing, and much of the fishing for other offshore fish, to a screeching halt.

One really can't do justice to September with a few words. It is a month when the sky is a bit bluer, the clouds a little whiter, the days a little cooler, and nights that remind us that the spicy days of autumn are not far away. □



# Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

## Total Fun in the Sand, Salt Air and Sun!

I am totally psyched!!!! I am going on my first real vacation in years! And it's going to be TOTAL FUN!

We're going to camp on the beach, surf fish for dinner, paddle in sea kayaks, fly stunt kites and generally do the touristy things that everyone does when they go to the beach. I can't wait!

Of course, how can one go on such a great vacation without a camera! With all this fun going on one has to make sure that all those memories are recorded for posterity; so obviously a camera is an essential part of the whole vacation experience. (I'll bet you're shocked that I would ever consider not bringing one!)

Unfortunately, salt water, sand and the sun could be considered the number one killers of today's delicate electronic cameras. So to help you protect your camera, here are some survival tips to assist you on your summer beach vacation.

Sand is insidious in its ability to penetrate everything. Cameras can be ruined by one unfortunate blast of sandy ocean wind. When I travel to the beach either I use a waterproof camera, which is already sealed to protect against the elements, or a sturdy Ziplock bag. Ziplock bags are cheap protection. I find a Ziplock bag is just big enough for the camera. Remember that you don't want too much loose space or the bag will get in your way. I place the camera in the bag, zipper side to the back, and press the front of the lens into the side of the bag just above the bag's bottom seam. It is here that I'll make a hole for the lens. To make the perfect hole, before you place the camera in the bag, remove the skylight

or UV filter which you should already have screwed into the front of your lens. If you don't have one, go out and get it now! This filter protects the front of a lens from scratches, sand, and corroding salt water! Remove the filter from the lens, place the camera in the bag as mentioned above and simply screw the filter back onto the lens...right over the plastic. You have now made a hole in the Ziplock bag. Remove the filter again and discard the circular plastic you've cut. Then, replace the



filter and the edges of the Ziplock bag should be just enough to hold the plastic bag in place. (If not use a little duct tape to secure the bag.) Now the entire camera is protected from sand and salt water! You can still easily see and get to all the knobs, whistles, and buttons on your camera. And, if you accidentally rip a hole in the plastic it can easily be replaced. Cheap insurance for your treasured camera!

When changing film on the beach, always be careful about sand getting into the back of the camera. Nothing is worse than getting back a bunch of pictures with horrible

scratches across them caused by rude little particles of sand which somehow made their way into the camera body. I always try to keep my back to the wind or I hide under a towel when reloading. You can also purchase a can of compressed air to lightly blast away any foreign particles before loading film. Once your film is removed always wind the leader in and return it to the plastic container because sand can still work its way into film cartridges and scratch your film during processing.

Now that we've addressed sand and salt water, let's move to the sun. Nothing can fry a camera and film like the heat of the sun so always remember to keep cameras and film out of direct sunlight. Never leave them sitting in a hot automobile, particularly on the dashboard. When outside try to place film in a cooler or with your camera in a bag under a beach chair, or anywhere shaded. Another consideration is temperature variations. If you and your film/camera have spent all day on the beach and then, go to lunch in a nice air-conditioned restaurant be prepared to return to the heat with a fogged camera. The temperature difference will cause condensation on the lens and viewfinder and it will take a while before the temperature in the camera and the outdoors balance and you can shoot a clear picture. This goes for your film as well.

When you head to the beach this summer, take a few moments to protect your film and camera! You don't want to miss all those memories...I know I'm not planning on missing anything! Have a great time! □



# Naturally Wild



story and illustration by Spike Knuth

## Eastern Towhee

From the coast, through the piedmont, to the mountains, it's almost impossible to go into any woodlands with brushy edges or openings and not hear a towhee. You'll either hear its "chee-wink," or "towhee," ("jo-ree,") calls or its song often translated as "drink your teeeee." Sometimes it sounds as if the bird is far away, yet it may be only a few yards away.

Eastern towhees are birds of the thickets. They live in the vine tangles of grape or greenbrier, stands of blackberry or any other thick vege-

his location through calling or singing. He's usually alone because the female is sitting tight on her well-concealed nest. Her first nest is normally built on the ground in a

While the female incubates, the male will be close by, singing and protecting his territory. His colors are unlike any other bird in the woods. His head, throat, chest, back, wings, and tail are black. He has a white belly with chestnut-brown sides and flanks. His short rounded wings have white wing bars and his tail has white outer feathers, which flash noticeably when he flies. The towhee's wings make an audible fluttering noise.

The female has brown where the male has black and her belly is more buffy. Juveniles are similar to the female but with a streaked appearance. Actually, the towhee's size and

shape is much like the cardinal minus the crest. Towhees from the north have red eyes, while those in the south have white eyes.

Towhees feed on the ground by scratching in the humus of the forest floor. It scratches away leaves and decaying vegetation by jumping up quickly, pulling its feet backward to uncover beetles and other insects, often a very noisy activity. While insects are its main food, they will feed on seeds and wild fruits of all kinds.

With the coming of fall, towhees become silent. Those in the north will migrate at the first hard freeze, though not in flocks. It's a sort of a meandering southward. In Virginia, towhees can be found all year round, often foraging along with cardinals, white-throated sparrows and juncos. One may even make a rare appearance under a backyard bird feeder. □



tation. Only on occasion will the male come out to sing from an elevated perch atop a small tree or shrub. Look for them especially along forest edges and clearcuts that are growing back up.

Towhees are secretive, solitary birds. The male is usually the bird you'll see, mainly because he reveals

slight hollow under a clump of grasses or under a small shrub. It's built of grasses, leaves, strips of bark, and lined with fine grasses, rootlets and animal hair. About 4 to 6 pale pinkish-white eggs, dotted with reddish-brown are laid. Second brood nests may be built up higher, but still low in a shrub or bush. Cowbirds seem to target the towhee nests for laying their eggs, perhaps because the host bird's eggs are similar in color and the parent birds the same size.

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# Want To Get Really Wild?

## Order your 1999-2000 Virginia Wildlife Calendar!

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Whether it's finding out when bald eagles gather on the James River, or when deer lose their antlers, the Virginia Wildlife Calendar helps put the wild back into wildlife. No other calendar gives you so much for so little. Interesting facts, special events, award-winning photography, natural history of animals in Virginia, plus a guide to knowing the best times to hunt, fish, and watch wildlife.

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